2.0 INTRODUCTION

This section provides background information about the Milton Local Protection Project, including the Congressional authority that provided for this study, the study purpose and need and other important information necessary for understanding the content and purpose of this report. As a reference for those readers not familiar with the Milton area, Figure 2-1, below, identifies topographic features frequently referred to in this document.

2.1 AUTHORITY

Authorities for the Lower Mud River Basin, Milton, West Virginia, Limited Reevaluation Study are Section 580 of the WRDA of 1996, which reads:

"The Corps of Engineers has been directed to…conduct a limited reevaluation of the watershed plan and environmental impact statement prepared for the Lower Mud River, Milton, W.V., by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, pursuant to the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16USC1001et seq.) and may carry out the project,"

and Section 340 of the WRDA of 2000, which reads:

"Modifies Lower Mud River project at Milton authority (Sec 580 of WRDA of 1996) to direct the COE to construct the project as selected in the COE reevaluation report."

2.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR AGENCY ACTION

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, (NRCS), formerly the Soil Conservation Service, completed a Watershed Plan and EIS in 1993 for the Lower Mud River Basin. Although the investigation involved the entire lower basin, the alternatives evaluated in detail in the NRCS watershed plan were for Milton and vicinity, including both a flood protection levee and Mud River channel modification. Prior to the Lower Mud River Basin study being transferred to the Corps of Engineers by Section 580 of the 1996 WRDA, the NRCS had at various times recommended either the protective levee or the channel modification as the most feasible plan. The current Corps study is a reevaluation of alternatives evaluated by the NRCS, in addition to other structural or nonstructural measures that may be economically feasible. This study includes the evaluation of Lower Mud River Basin, but the focus is on flood reduction measures for the City of Milton and vicinity.

Milton has a history of flooding dating back to the early 1900's. Major floods occurred in 1913, 1939, 1978, and the most recent in 1997, which is considered to be the flood of record. The ten largest floods at Milton, based on peak discharges at the Mud River gage are displayed in Table 5-1. Flood conditions at Milton are a result of both natural features and development activity. Upstream from Milton the Mud River watershed is characterized by steep gradients and rather narrow valleys which can cause high flood peaks. When the flows reach the wide floodplain at Milton, the flood waters spread out over the valley inundating much of the business and residential areas located north of the Mud River between US 60 and I-64.

2.3 STUDY AREA

Mud River originates in Boone County, West Virginia, and flows about 58 miles in a northwesterly direction to its confluence with the Guyandotte River at Barboursville, West Virginia. The basin has a total drainage area of 360 square miles. The Mud River Basin lies within the Appalachian Plateau, and the topography of the watershed is dominated by rather steep, narrow ridges and relatively narrow flood plains, particularly in the upper basin. The upper watershed above the Town of Hamlin, consisting of about 96 square miles, is controlled by a small multiple purpose reservoir constructed by the NRCS in January 1993. The lower watershed which includes about 263 square miles, extends from the mouth of Mud River to the confluence with Middle Fork at Hamlin. The topography of this lower area is more moderate, with less steep hills and wider floodplains, particularly in the Milton area.

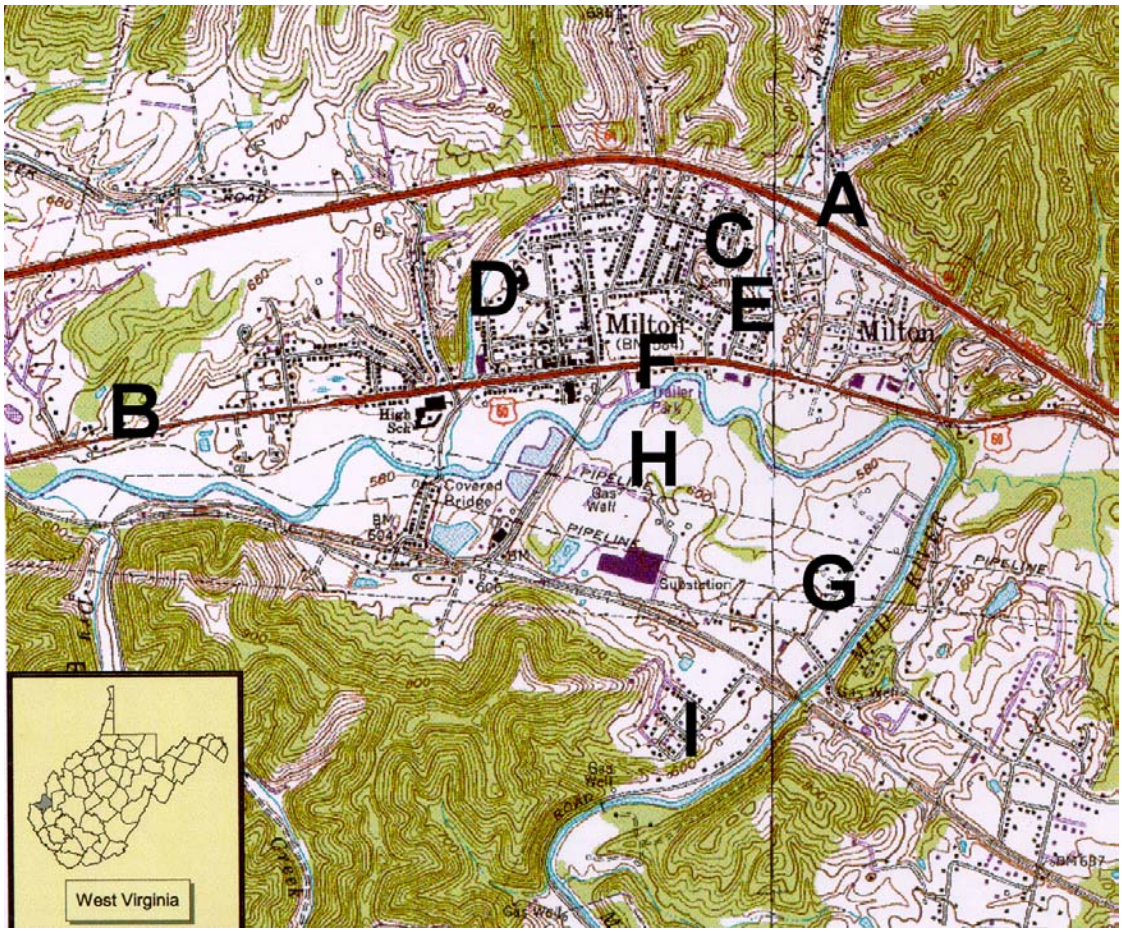
Milton, which is located in the lower basin approximately 19 miles above the mouth of Mud River, is the major flood damage center in the basin. Milton has a population of 2,200 persons in a 1.58 square mile area, and is considered a bedroom community between Huntington and Charleston, WV. Milton is also part of the Huntington-Ashland, Ky-and Ironton, OH Metropolitan area (MSA). Overall, the economy in Milton is relatively stable and unemployment rate is very low. Employment is mainly in the educational, health and social services section, retail trade and arts, entertainment and recreation. There is an estimated 155 businesses in Milton employing estimated 892 people.

2.4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Since the Corps was directed to evaluate flood reduction measures, a number of meetings have been held in the City. An initial scoping meeting was held on September 11, 2001 and a second in December 2001. Prior to the Corps becoming involved with the project, meetings for the original project EIS were held and are documented in the NRCS report which was completed in 1993.

A Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Lower Mud River Watershed Project, Milton, Cabell County, WV was published in the Federal Register August 14, 2002 (Volume 67, Number 157, page 52959).

To keep the Milton community informed throughout the study process, a citizen's action group consisting of community members in the vicinity of Milton was formed and held their first meeting in November 2002 with the Corps as an invited guest. They have continued meeting on the fourth Thursday of each month at 9:30 am in the Milton City Hall. Members include the City Council, West Virginia Conservation Agency, Cabell County Floodplain Coordinator, and concerned citizens. Meetings are informal and open to the public.



A – Interstate 64
B – US Route 60
C – Perry Morris Square
D – Newman's Branch
E – John's Branch
F – Harbour Trailer Park
G – Georgia Avenue
H – Pumpkin Park
I – West Mud River Road

Figure 2-1. Frequently referred to topographic features in Milton and vicinity.

A public meeting to discuss the draft report will be held in July 2003. Comments documents, including the verbatim transcripts of the public hearing and all letters and comment sheets will be analyzed to discern each specific comment. A sequential number will be assigned to each specific comment. Analysis of the comments will identify categories and responses will be given. All comments and responses will be documented in the final version of the report.

Comments on the Draft LRR/SEIS may be received by electronically or letter mail and should be sent to: S. Michael Worley, Chief, Planning Branch, CELRH-PM-PD, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Huntington District, 502 Eighth Street, Huntington, West Virginia 25701-2070. Telephone: 304-529-5636. E-mail: Stephen.M.Worley@lrh01.usace.army.mil.

For additional information about the proposed project, contact Louis Aspey, Project Manager, CELRH-PM-P, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Huntington District, 502 Eighth Street, Huntington, West Virginia, 25701–2070. Telephone: 304-528-7446. Electronic mail: Louis.E.Aspey.II@lrh01.usace.army.mil.

2.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) established a national environmental policy and goals for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the environment. It also provides a process for implementing these goals within Federal agencies. It requires all Federal agencies to incorporate environmental considerations in planning and decision-making. NEPA also established the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and empowered them to develop regulations by which all Federal agencies would comply with NEPA. These regulations are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 40 CFR 1500-1508.

The Corps of Engineers has promulgated its own procedures for implementing NEPA (33 CFR Part 230) to provide guidance for the procedural provisions of NEPA. ER 200-2-2 supplements is used in conjunction with the CEQ regulations.

Within the NEPA Regulations and ER 200-2-2, a process is set forth where all agencies must assess the environmental impact of proposed Federal actions and consider reasonable alternatives to their proposed actions. For those actions with the greatest potential to create significant environmental effects, the consideration of the proposed action and alternatives are presented in an EIS.

The Corps of Engineers has incorporated environmental values throughout the decision-making process. The information gathered during the development of this Draft LRR/SEIS has led to alterations in project design and mitigation measures by providing an opportunity for public and resource agencies to provide input into the planning process. It also has allowed the Corps to address compliance with other environmental laws as part of a single review process rather than through separate reviews thereby reducing paperwork while ensuring comprehensiveness.

2.6 CONNECTED, CUMULATIVE AND SIMILAR ACTIONS

The CEQ Regulations require "connected actions, cumulative actions, and similar actions" (40 CFR 1508.25) to be considered together in a single EIS. Connected actions are defined as actions that: (i) automatically trigger other actions, which may require environmental impact statements, (ii) cannot or will not proceed unless other actions are taken previously or simultaneously, and (iii) are interdependent parts of a larger action and depend on the larger action for their justification. Cumulative actions, when viewed with other proposed actions have cumulatively significant impacts and should therefore be discussed in the same impact statement. Similar actions are defined as actions which, when viewed with other reasonably foreseeable or proposed agency actions, have similarities that provide a basis for evaluating their environmental consequence together, such as timing or geography.

The NRCS Lower Mud River Watershed Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (1993) examined flooding and other water related resource problems in the watershed. Flood damage reduction measures previously developed in the Upper Mud River Watershed at Hamlin could be considered similar or cumulative action (40 CFR 1508.25).